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## What Is “The Word of God” in Sacred Scripture?

### Jakie „słowo Boże” w Piśmie Świętym?

**Abstract.** This article addresses the interdependence of the terms “word of God” and “Sacred Scripture,” as used in the doctrine of biblical inspiration, in the context of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2014 document *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*. In the article, the essential features of the definition and function of Sacred Scripture are presented, and the understanding of the word of God in the context of the Old and New Testaments is demonstrated. In the concluding section, an attempt is made to answer the question of under what circumstances it is appropriate to equate the above two terms.

**Streszczenie.** W niniejszym artykule zostaje podjęty problem wzajemnej zależności obecnych w naukach o natchnieniu biblijnym określeń „słowo Boże” oraz „Pismo Święte”, w kontekście wydanego przez Papieską Komisję Biblijną dokumentu pt. „Natchnienie i prawda Pisma Świętego. Słowo, które od Boga pochodzi i mówi o Bogu, aby zbawić świat” z 2014 roku. Po przedstawieniu istotnych cech definicji oraz funkcji Pisma Świętego zostaje wykazane rozumienie słowa Bożego w kontekście Starego i Nowego Testamentu. Ostatecznie zostaje podjęta próba udzielenia odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jakich okolicznościach właściwe jest postawienie znaku równości między wspomnianymi wyżej terminami.

**Keywords:** word of God, Scripture, The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture, biblical inspiration.

**Słowa kluczowe:** słowo Boże, Pismo Święte, „Natchnienie i prawda Pisma Świętego”, natchnienie biblijne.

During the Synod of Bishops convened by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008, which was centered around the theme of “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” the Synod Fathers considered and addressed a number of difficult issues which they then referred for clarification to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Two of the questions raised by the Synod seem to be relevant to this article: (1) Why does the Church solemnly say to the faithful “The Word of the Lord” after the reading of each of the first two passages of the Bible, and “The Gospel of the Lord” at the end of the proclamation of the gospel? (2) How should someone with a modern humanistic, social, and, in particular, anthropological and cultural sensitivity accept as “the word of God” those texts of Sacred Scripture which speak of the law of extermination, severe retribution for the wrongs that one has suffered, or God’s vengeance upon His enemies (the “cursing” or “imprecatory” psalms), or those in which the social and religious status of women seems to be lower than that of men? This article does not aim to answer the above questions, because the issues to which they pertain have already been clarified by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in its document titled *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, in sections 16–106 and 177–218. Nevertheless, a careful consideration of the respective sections of the document gives rise to further questions, such as the following: How should one understand the terms “word of God” and “Sacred Scripture”? Is it appropriate to equate the two concepts? Is all that is written in Sacred Scripture “the word of God”? And, finally, what is “the word of God” in Sacred Scripture? We will attempt to answer these questions by referring, for the most part, to what has already been proposed in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, taking into account the doctrine of the Church and the opinions of the theologians who have addressed the subject of biblical inspiration in their works.

To that end, we will begin by explaining the terms “Sacred Scripture” (1) and “the word of God” in the context of both the Old Testament and the New Testament (2), and then attempt to answer the questions of why one can speak of the presence of the word of God in Sacred Scripture and whether it is appropriate to use the two terms interchangeably, thus identifying the Bible with the word of God (3). Finally, we will summarize the issues discussed in the article in the conclusions (4).

## 1. The Term “Sacred Scripture”

When analyzing the term “Sacred Scripture” (or “the Bible,” from the Greek Βιβλία, “books”), one should first consider the outcome of the human action, which is the written document itself. “Scripture” means something that has been set down in writing, that is, recorded on some writing medium with specific graphical signs (arranged in logical succession) which are used by a particular society at a particular time and in a particular environment. The adjective “sacred” added to the noun “scripture” is used to define more precisely the content of what has been written. The sanctity of Sacred Scripture can be considered in two dimensions: (1) that of form and (2) that of content. In the former dimension, it is the medium on which the divine word has been recorded that is considered sacred, and this aspect is particularly emphasized in the Judaistic tradition. Thus, we can speak of the sanctity of a scroll or a book. Importantly, this sanctity is ritual in character because the copying of the Tanakh is subject to special rules which are enforced within the temple setting by priests, charged with making copies of writings, invested with divine authority. It should be noted, however, that the degree of sanctity of a book decreases proportionally as priestly authority is replaced with rabbinic authority. With regard to the sanctity of the content (2), the emphasis is not placed on the book as a written record but on the idea, message, or central theme of the text that is being read (Pikor 2007, 85–86).

As regards the writing of Sacred Scripture, it is important to note that recent historical and critical research has challenged the idea that Scripture was set down in writing in a single act, which means that the Bible was not written by a single author. Today, scholars tend to speak of many acts of writing, which implies that there may have been many human authors to whom the authorship of the biblical books can be attributed in both literary and linguistic terms. Still, while the writing of the Bible was a prolonged activity (extending over at least several centuries), it is possible to speak of the continuity of the biblical message as one of the effects of inspiration. Taking into account the *Sitz im Leben* of the formation of Sacred Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the aspect of “setting down in writing” must also include the original oral accounts of the content that was only later committed to writing.<sup>1</sup> On that basis, we

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<sup>1</sup> The role of the inspired author as a member of a specific community within whose environment Scripture was created is mentioned in Zatwardnicki 2013, 20.

can draw conclusions about the primary and central function of writing, which is to preserve the word that was first expressed internally, then made audible, and finally committed to writing (Alonso Schökel 1965, 241, 247).

## 2. The Essence of “The Word of God”

When reflecting on the essence and meaning of “the word of God,” it is important to ask what the term “word” signifies in the first place. The French theologian Yves Congar (1986) says that “the word is an act by which a person makes known his or her thoughts and feelings to another by signs. It is therefore the act of one person addressing another. [...] Images too enable a personal and creative subject to communicate with other persons” (9). Thus, the question of the word of God is set in the broader context of God’s self-revelation to the world, although it is not the only means by which YHWH reveals Himself. While the word should be considered the most complete method of communication between God and man, it only ranks third in chronological sequence, preceded by God’s manifestation in creation and by His revelation in history (Alonso Schökel 1965, 27–42). As Henryk Muszyński (1983) notes, “in its most profound essence, the word of Yahweh is identified with God Himself because it is the outward manifestation of the personal God and the carrier of His limitless power” (6–7). In effect, the word of God becomes a fundamental historico-salvific event in the history of the Chosen People, and it would also be correct to describe it as a place in which God is experienced. This function of the word of God—as an event and a place—is closely interconnected with the manner in which it was understood in ancient Israel. There, the word was not used for communication alone: the *Dabar YHWH* was, first and foremost, full of dynamism—it carried in itself specific information, but also had a causative power (i.e., it acted) and could therefore change reality (Muszyński 1984, 168–169).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the word of God became a mediator in the encounter between man and YHWH (Pikor 2003, 88). Through His word, God gives Himself to the world, which is why He is referred to as the “living” God, that is, one who acts and who redeems through His speech (Muszyński 1983, 6).

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of the “word of YHWH” that creates and sustains is also retained in the Targumic tradition, in which the “God’s Memra” (מַמְרָא דִּי יְיָ) has divine characteristics and is even identified with God. For more on this subject, see Wróbel 2016, 121.

## 2.1. The Word of God in the Old Testament

In the document on inspiration, the authors propose a dual understanding of the term “word of God” (*verbum Domini*). Taking into account the syntactic aspect of this compound, it can be taken to mean (1) a word that comes from God—in the sense that God speaks the word (*Domini* as *genetivus originis*) in a (a) direct or (b) indirect manner, or (2) a word that speaks of God—in the sense that God is the object of the word (*genetivus obiectivus*). It appears that these two possible meanings are mutually complementary. After all, as the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014) observes, “only God knows God; consequently, only God can speak of God in an adequate and reliable way” (sec. 3). Content that attests to the divine origin of the message can be found in the Bible itself, and the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document analyzes the testimony of selected books of the Old Testament (secs. 11–21) and the New Testament (secs. 22–49), using them as a basis for explaining that the written word indeed comes from God. It seems fitting to address these conclusions so as to gain a better understanding of the essence of the word of God in the Old Testament.

A classic example of *verbum Domini* as a word that comes directly from God (re. 1a), that is, a word that has been spoken by YHWH, is Exodus 19:19. In Exodus 19, Moses makes his way to Mount Sinai, where he speaks to God, who reveals Himself to Israel. The biblical author explicitly notes that “Moses spoke, and God answered him *with a voice* (וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְקוֹל) *we-ha-’elohim ya’anenu beqol* in thunder.” Here, YHWH condescends to the level of the recipient of the message (i.e., Moses) and, by using human language, makes His words comprehensible both to the mediator of His revelation and to the people (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 11). Moses is then commanded to write down a document that attests to the making of the covenant (Exodus 24:4: “And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD”) and the renewal of that covenant (Exodus 34:27a: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words. . .”). In both passages, the biblical author makes note of YHWH’s command to carry out a specific task, that is, to commit to writing the words spoken by God to Moses, who thus becomes the only mediator of God’s revelation (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 11; see also Archutowski 1930, 23). The motif of the divine origin of the written word is also repeated in the account of the Decalogue, which “can be considered as the point of departure for the idea of the divine origin of Sacred Scripture (inspiration), because *as a text* only the Decalogue is connected with the idea of having been written by God Himself” (Pontifical Biblical Commis-

sion 2014, sec. 12).<sup>3</sup> Passed down the centuries, the Torah has its true starting point in God, even though it was written in human language. Consequently, it is possible to speak of a “self-testimony” of Sacred Scripture that is supplemented by the writing down of the text by Moses as mentioned in Deuteronomy 31:9. What Henryk Witczyk sees here is a *legalistic* model of inspiration, applicable to both Moses and the Pentateuch itself, which is well grounded in the direct and historical experience of YHWH. It is God Himself who becomes the source and thus the only and authoritative giver of the Law, expressing His will through His chosen mediator and the first prophet: Moses (Witczyk 2017, 49–50; 2020, 36).<sup>4</sup>

The words that come from God in an indirect manner (re. 1b) are those recorded in the prophetic books (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 13). It is worth noting that more than 90 percent of the occurrences of the Hebrew syntagm *Dabar YHWH* (דבר יהוה) in the Old Testament appear in the context of the prophetic word (von Rad 1965, 96; Muszyński 1983, 8). The prophet initially awaits the word of the Lord, and then does everything in his power so that the word or event that he has “heard” or “seen” is faithfully conveyed to the recipients (hearers). In these texts, God’s message is introduced using a prophetic opening formula, that is, “The word of the Lord came to me” (the word-event formula) or “Thus says the Lord” (the messenger formula), and followed by a closing (concluding) formula, that is, “declares the Lord” (Stachowiak 1990, 249–250).<sup>5</sup> It is also important to bear in mind that it is the prophet who experiences what can be described as a word-event, which he then puts into an appropriate verbal form (that is, into human language). From a literary analysis perspective, the prophetic formulae mentioned above, which point the reader’s attention to the message given by YHWH Himself, are always the work of the prophet. This is significant because it implies that the literary style through which the recorded

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<sup>3</sup> Other texts of the Pentateuch also attest to the idea of writing down God’s words. See Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1,28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 9:10; 10:4. In the context of historical and critical research, the mention of God’s writing down the Decalogue should be treated as a product of the theological reflection of the time of the exile. For more on this subject, see Lemański 2017, 66–78.

<sup>4</sup> One of the authors who emphasize the role of Moses as a prophet is Barbiero (2013, 49–54).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of these prophetic formulas, see Bretón 1987. With regard to prophetic preaching, Józef Archutowski distinguishes between the word pronounced under oral inspiration (*inspiratio ad loquendum*) and the word written down under the influence of inspiration proper (*ad scribendum*). See Archutowski 1930, 24.

word is communicated comes from the prophet himself. When God calls upon the prophet, He releases in him—by way of the grace with which He endows him—a creative literary capacity, which means that the action of the prophet as proclaimer and writer is dynamic rather than mechanical. Otherwise, the prophet’s personality could be eliminated, which would be a perversion of inspiration (Alonso Schökel 1965, 96–98).<sup>6</sup>

Another place in which God reveals Himself in the Old Testament are the historical books. In some cases, God addresses a man directly and tells him what he should do, and in other cases, a leader appointed by God communicates the will of YHWH to the people in the manner of a prophet. In the books of Samuel and Kings, the institution of the prophet who proclaims disaster as a consequence of disobedience is identical to that described in the prophetic books. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014) observes, “in short, the prophetic books present themselves entirely as the Word of the Lord.<sup>7</sup> This idea occupies a predominant place in the historical books as well. Both groups, especially the historical books, specify that the Word of the Lord has an infallible efficacy and calls to conversion” (sec. 16).

As has been noted above, it is also appropriate to interpret the word of God (*verbum Domini*) as a word that speaks about God (re. 2). The authors of the Psalter speak of how good and merciful God is to those who seek His help and of the works that YHWH accomplishes out of His love for His creation (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, secs. 17–19). The Psalms are the prayers of those who have experienced God’s presence in their lives, and thus represent the voice of God the Creator in His creation (see Witczyk 2020, 55–60). Through the fear of God that is present in the hearts of His believers, YHWH invites them to enter into a relationship based on earnest friendship and, at the same time, grants them the grace of a deep understanding of the Covenant that He made with

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<sup>6</sup> Waldemar Linke notes that the written prophetic text should not always be considered a prophet’s entire work. Despite the fact that prophets have a strong conviction about the divine authority of their activity and preaching, which is in fact true, the very written texts of their books are the result of an editing process that spans an extended period of time and continues after the prophet’s death. See Linke 2011, 158.

<sup>7</sup> It needs to be clarified, however, that the authors of the historical texts do not themselves describe their works as “the word of God” in a direct manner, as was the case with the prophets. The authors collect their material, consult court archives, and compose poems. Their work is more akin to the manner and method of description adopted by sapiential authors. See Alonso Schökel 1965, 101–102.

His people on Sinai. In light of the above, the book of Psalms contains a *prayer* inspiration that is always ignited in the life of a praying person by God (Witczyk 2020, 37–38).

The sapiential books, in which a special place is reserved for the idea of wisdom (to which human characteristics are sometimes attributed), represent the desire of the learned to meditate on the Torah and share the results of their reflection with others (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 20).<sup>8</sup> Wisdom dwells in Israel in the same manner as that in which the Law is present among the people (Sirach 24:23–29), and can be gained by keeping and contemplating the Torah as its only source (Leks 1997, 35–36).<sup>9</sup>

The truth and divine provenance of the texts of the Old Testament are attested to in two New Testament passages which are considered to be direct testimonies to biblical inspiration, that is, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. In his letter, Peter underlines the authenticity and importance of the Old Testament prophecies. The community of believers accepts them as an unquestionable authority (Rosik 2003, 142–144), and the prophets are considered holy men who spoke “from God” (ἀπὸ θεοῦ).<sup>10</sup> Directing his teaching to Timothy, the Apostle Paul commands him to keep “all Scripture [that] is breathed out by God” (πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος). This phrase requires some commentary, in particular with regard to the adjective θεόπνευστος, which consists of the noun θεός (“God”) and the verb πνέω (“to breathe”). This adjective can be interpreted both actively and passively: in the former case, the translation is “*God-breathed*,” and in the latter, “*God-breathing*.” As it appears, the passive translation is more appropriate. Ultimately, it should be concluded that God breathed into the Scriptures, which is why they are ultimately inspired by Him and can be used for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (Stępień 1979, 441–442; Szymanek 1990, 417; Szymik 2009, 793–794; Linke 2011, 160–165).

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the relationship between the Torah and wisdom as the word that comes from God, see Costacurta 2013, 62–73.

<sup>9</sup> The above understanding of wisdom in the context of the Torah was significantly affected by Israel’s historical situation. After the return from the Babylonian captivity, the temple as the only place of worship no longer existed. With prophetism vanishing, the Torah began to be considered the only available essence of revelation. From that moment onward, Israel’s liturgical life began to revolve around the Law. See Schäfer 2003, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Although Peter speaks explicitly about “prophecies,” other writings of the Old Testament cannot be excluded from this inspiration. See Linke 2011, 169.

## 2.2. The Word of God in the New Testament

In his monograph on inspiration, Luis Alonso Schökel (1965) observes that “when we inquire into the fundamental problem in the mystery of inspiration and ask: ‘How can words be at once both divine and human?’, the answer is spontaneous: in a way similar to that by which Christ is both man and God” (53). In other words, the writings of the New Testament can only be considered the word of God if we accept the fact of the Incarnation of God’s Son. A classic biblical text cited by authors to attest to this relationship is Hebrews 1:1–2: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”<sup>11</sup> In the constitution *Dei Verbum*, the Council Fathers consider Jesus Christ to be the ultimate point of God’s self-manifestation through His word: “Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as ‘a man to men.’ He ‘speaks the words of God’ (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4)” (Second Vatican Council 1966, sec. 4). Without doubt, the person of Jesus, the Savior, becomes the foundation upon which any other historical reality of the Church can be interpreted in the perspective of the word (Martini 1980, 56–57; Zatwardnicki 2013, 26–28). However, this communication of God the Father through Jesus, the Word, will only be made complete at the end of time, when Christ “delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Thus, vigilance should become permanently inscribed in the minds of the disciples who receive the message of the Gospel (Mielcarek 2017, 102). In light of the above, we may speak of a *Christological* model of inspiration that is validated and complemented by the *pneumatological* model, which, ultimately, is consistent with the traditional doctrine of inspiration that considers the Holy Spirit to be the main author of the Bible (Witczyk 2020, 40; Szymik 2015, 227).

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, which is translated in the English Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version as “by his Son” and “by a Son,” respectively, can also be translated as “in [his] Son.” Another possibility (taking into account the Semitic way of thinking, where the Greek preposition ἐν is used to translate the Hebrew ׀ that introduces the dative) is “has spoken to us with his Son.” The latter translation option (with the dative) seems to be important: the fact that the Son (Jesus Christ) is the Word of the Father (see John 1:1–14) suggests that God has spoken to us “with His Son,” that is, “with His Word.”

At this point, it seems fitting to at least outline the manner in which the word of God is understood in different parts of the New Testament. According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1966), the Gospels, as a written record of the life and teaching of Jesus, “have a special preeminence, and rightly so” (sec. 18). The word “gospel” is derived from the Old English word *godspell* (“good news”), which draws its etymology from the Greek verb εὐαγγελίζω. The Greek word, which occurs twenty-three times in the Septuagint,<sup>12</sup> is itself a translation of the Hebrew term בָּשָׂר, *basar*. This term has a relatively broad range of meanings in the New Testament and may refer to: (1) Jesus’ teaching, which is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of the proclamation of liberation for the distressed sons of Israel; (2) the person of Jesus, because the content of His teaching is complementary to His essence; (3) the teaching of the apostles, since the term is used in the context of the proclamation of the message of God’s salvific action through Jesus Christ and occurs as many as 46 times in Paul’s writings; and (4) the books in which the content of the Good News is recorded. In each case, the source of the Gospel is always God.

According to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, the entire Gospel should be considered the word of God because it presents the person of Jesus, in whom both the Old Testament story of the covenant with the people and the self-revelation of YHWH take place (sec. 30). The earliest mediators of and witnesses to the Gospel as the word that was first communicated orally and then conveyed in writing were the apostles, and it is important in this context to note their faith in the Son of God and their personal relationship (or even “intimate union,” see Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 8) with Him (see Witczyk 2017, 52–53). In the Gospels themselves, with regard to the historicity of the words and actions of Jesus, it is possible to distinguish *ipsissima verba / facta / intentio* and *vox Iesu* (Bock 1995, 77). To accept the Gospel as the word of God, however, it is not necessary to repeat literally what Jesus said. What matters instead is communicating the Good News that was proclaimed by Jesus, and thus, as the written text, inspired by the Spirit of Christ (Alonso Schökel 1983, 82; Szymik 2015, 227).<sup>13</sup> According to Congar (1986), “this apostolic word

<sup>12</sup> See 2 Samuel 4:10; Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 60:5–6; 61:1; Psalm 96:2.

<sup>13</sup> In this context, it is worth mentioning the literary form adopted by the fourth evangelist, which is significantly different from the synoptic accounts. Despite this, however, the evangelist conveys Jesus’s words as faithfully as the synoptic evangelists do. See Witczyk 2020, 41.

is identical with the Gospel. Like in the Gospel, its content and agent is Jesus Christ” (11). This fact is important when one takes into account books of the New Testament other than the Gospels. In the Acts of the Apostles, the “eyewitnesses” (see Luke 1:2; Acts 1:8) are now mandated—by virtue of their relationship with Jesus, whom they knew in person—to proclaim the word of the Risen Christ. His work is continued by the Holy Spirit, who is present in the community of the Church (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 38). The apostolic letters, and in particular the epistles of Paul, contain the only and true Gospel of the living Lord—an account to which divine origin should be attributed (see Galatians 1–2; Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 40). The “true words of God” (οὔτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν, Revelation 19:9) revealed to the visionary are also mentioned by the author of Revelation. Here, their truthfulness should be attributed to the mystery of inspiration (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 100; Witczyk 2017, 64).

### 3. Sacred Scripture as the Word of God

In the preceding sections, we have demonstrated how selected messages conveyed verbally in the Old and New Testaments can be considered the word of God. However, it is important to bear in mind that these messages are conveyed in human words (and thus, they are only available to us in the form of human language). So, on what basis can we see the word of God in Sacred Scripture (which was written by the inspired human author)? When speaking of the human word that is recorded in the books of the Bible and that we consider to be the word of God, it is appropriate to refer to the notion of analogical predication.<sup>14</sup> As Christ, the Eternal Word, took on a human body, so did the word coming from the mouth of God become human language. In his encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII (1943) notes that “as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, ‘except sin,’ so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error” (sec. 37).

It is also worth asking how the human word of the biblical author becomes the word of God. This happens whenever the author writes under the influence

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<sup>14</sup> Yves Congar believes that analogy can provide a basis for theological reflection when he argues that “it is possible to speak of God.” See Congar 1986, 3.

of the breath of the Spirit. Then, the author's words are considered God's because each of them reveals God. Inspiration is therefore a special type of communication with God (and also with the Son of God) by which He only communicates to men what He Himself intends to communicate, using the human author—who speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit—to achieve that goal. This operation of the Spirit (that is, inspiration) is not a mere advice or moral impulse. On the contrary, it is physical in nature because it affects the human author's linguistic capabilities. In addition, it is also charismatic because it pertains to the supernatural order (Alonso Schökel 1965, 56). An important aspect here is the gift of a personal relationship with God that arises in the author as a result of a properly internalized fear of God. A person who accepts inspiration becomes open to different means by which God may reveal Himself, including the most important revelation: the manifestation of God to the world in the person of Jesus Christ (Witczyk 2020, 45).

An essential part of the doctrine of inspiration at the third and last stage of God's revelation (that is, revelation through the word) is the acceptance of the fact that God speaks to man using human language and through human beings. Transcendent and thus inaccessible to human sensory cognition, God condescends to man and uses words which are comprehensible to His recipients. Since He has willed to use human means of communication, our language becomes elevated to the divine level while still remaining human. The purpose of the condescension of the word of God to the level of human language is redemption and salvation (Alonso Schökel 1983, 42–43). Therefore, Sacred Scripture should be treated as a work that is profoundly and genuinely human, one in which the word spoken by God is not given to the recipient directly but in the form of the true witness of revelation. Only on that basis can the Bible be considered the word of God. In light of the above, it can be concluded that Sacred Scripture bears witness to divine revelation (Collins 1990, 1032–1033; Mannucci and Mazzinghi 2016, 255, 258–259). For that reason, the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014) state that “the Sacred Scriptures form a unified whole, because all the books, ‘with all their parts,’ possess the character of an inspired text, since they have God Himself ‘as their author.’ Nevertheless, although acknowledging that every word of the sacred text can be considered the Word of God, consistent with all the others, yet the Church has always recognized an aspect of multiplicity, which can seem to be in contrast with its unique divine origin” (sec. 139).

## Conclusions

While the terms “Sacred Scripture” and “word of God” analyzed in this article can be used interchangeably, it is important to make note of some significant differences between them. The term “Sacred Scripture,” which contains in itself “the word of God,” in fact points to the act of writing a specific work, taking into account the person of the human author, the literary aspects of the text, and the circumstances and time of its creation. The sanctity of a book may stem from its form (as Jewish tradition would have it). However, due to the fact that Christianity is a religion of the word rather than “a religion of the book” (Benedict XVI 2010, sec. 7), when speaking of the sanctity of the Bible, it is more appropriate to refer to its content. The function of writing is to preserve the word, which is why Sacred Scripture protects the word of God as the means by which God reveals Himself to the world. The Old Testament phrase *Dabar YHWH* was treated in its time as a dynamic and creative reality as well as a means by which God communicated with man. As demonstrated above, the term “word of God” can be taken to mean a word that comes from Him (directly or indirectly) or a word that speaks of Him, but these two meanings are mutually complementary. God also reveals Himself through history, which should be considered a special mode of revelation of the word. The understanding of the word of God is complemented by the Incarnation of the Son of God, whose mission is described by the texts of the New Testament. The Gospel—not only that recorded by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, but also that proclaimed, for example, by the Apostle Paul—is the word of God because it is the word of Christ, who is both the subject and the object of that Gospel.

In view of what has been said above, the question that remains to be answered is the one which prompted the reflection presented in this article: What is the word of God in Sacred Scripture? The answer is that every word written in the Bible through which God, by using the executive functions of the human author, communicates with man and reveals Himself to humankind should be considered the word of God. A precondition, however, is the divine inspiration of the human author, which should be considered a real yet supernatural force that guides the human executive functions. Retaining the freedom granted to him in the act of creation, and, at the same time, being in a personal relationship with God, the inspired biblical author thus transfers the things, and only the things, which God intended to reveal to humanity by allowing Himself to be “enclosed”

in the space of human language. Only by inspiration can the human word be elevated to the dignity of the word of God (see Benedict XVI 2010, sec. 19).

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